THE WORCESTER NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

HERBERT D. BRAMAN.

In 1854 some of the members of the Worcester Young Men's Library Association, leading spirits among them being Thomas W. Higginson and Edward Everett Hale, formed a branch for the study of natural history. Later the association gave its books to the city library and became "The Worcester Lyceum and Natural History Association," whose objects were: "The diffusion and promotion of useful knowledge among the inhabitants of the city and county of Worcester: (1) by courses of popular lectures; (2) by encouraging the study of natural history, and by the collection and preservation of specimens in the various departments, together with a library with a view to that end." Later the present name was taken.

Any resident of Worcester County, above the age of fourteen years, could become a member. The present membership is sixty, the fact that the privileges are free to all, keeping the membership small.

The charter of the society has just been changed by the present legislature, limiting the managing membership to fifty and providing for an unlimited associate membership, the details not having been fixed as yet.

Acting upon the advice of Louis Agassiz, regarding a collection, it has been the purpose of the society to gather and preserve such specimens as shall represent the life history of each species of the animals and vegetables in Worcester County, also its rocks and minerals; further, to illustrate from outside localities the subkingdoms of organic and inorganic matter.

The collection which has resulted consists in part of: Mammals, 63 species, 40 from Worcester County; birds, 400 species, 234 from Worcester County, with nests and eggs of 120 species; reptiles, 50 species, 25 from Worcester County; fishes, 70 species, 12 from Worcester County; insects, includ-

ing spiders and myriopods, 2434, from Worcester County; crustacea, 11 species, 3 from Worcester County; mollusks (represented by shells), 1500 species, 4000 specimens, 33 from Worcester County. Echinoderms and corals are well represented, and the lower forms by a collection of microscopic slides.

From the vegetable kingdom, pressed specimens (Worcester County, except some of the algæ), there are: Seed plants, 600 species; ferns, club mosses, etc., 40; mosses and liverworts, 148; fungi, 34; algæ, 137 (almost wholly marine); diatoms (slides), few.

The inorganic kingdom is well represented by about 2000 specimens; rocks and minerals from all parts of the world, among them being the representative rocks of central and southern Worcester County, and 57 species of minerals from the county.

This material, plainly labeled, is arranged in upright and horizontal cases and drawers in the rooms of the society building, at the corner of State and Harvard streets. The museum is open to the public without charge six days in the week, and is visited by about 6000 people yearly. There is an intelligent custodian in charge, ready to be helpful in every possible way to visitors.

Special displays are made from time to time upon the tables in the larger rooms. For instance, during the early part of last winter a display of the coniferæ of Worcester County was made, consisting of sprays of the foliage of each species, with the cones. Later were shown the winter birds of Worcester County — permanent and transient — first the hawk group, then the smaller birds, and finally the game and water birds. Two or three weeks are allowed for such exhibits, and at the same time articles are published in the daily papers describing them. During the past summer and fall the flowers and fruits of the county, as they made their appearance, were brought in and shown, marked with their common and scientific names.

The work is also educational, and the society encourages the use of its material by all interested in any branch of natural history. Its rooms are supplied with tables where one may

study specimens in the collection. It has a small reference library whose books are sometimes loaned. There are also two rooms for special study; one fitted up as a mineralogical laboratory, with gas fixtures, reagents, blowpipes, and other appliances, ready for use at any time; another fitted for use as a botanical laboratory.

For purposes of study, duplicate specimens are loaned as freely as books from a public library, and this is taken advantage of by the teachers of the city schools, who not only borrow objects for their own study, but for use in their class work. There were loaned to teachers and others during the last year: 344 birds, 18 nests, 30 mammals, 72 lots of minerals and rocks, 20 fossils, and a lesser number each of shells, charts, drawings, and books.

The society fosters the study of natural history by its yearly classes, many branches of the subject in the past having been covered. Those arranged for 1899, now under way, are: For the study of birds, two — one for adults, one for children; botany, two — one each for adults and children; elementary biology and microscopy, one; mineralogy, one. The classroom is not large enough to well accommodate the attendance at some of these classes.

The society gives a series of lectures each winter and spring, covering natural history subjects generally. It has also endeavored to popularize nature study by means of interesting articles in the daily papers of the city, on the mammals, birds, fish, frogs, toads, turtles, mollusks, flowers, minerals, and geology of the county, written by its members.

Again, the society aims to make its collection and work useful in all ways, as, for instance, in answering questions that may arise as to the best means of combating harmful plants and animals, and fostering those which are beneficial; also as to the economic values of woods, rocks, etc.

Two pamphlets have been published: *Flora of Worcester County*, by Joseph Jackson, Jr., 46 pp., 1883; and *The Physical Geography of Worcester, Mass.*, by Joseph H. Perry, F. G. S. A., 40 pp., 1898.

The society has invested funds of the par value of $6,500;

it also receives the income of $10,000 trust funds, for which it is obliged to give yearly in a neighboring town a course of six lectures on natural history, "at its own expense, by competent and able and well-known scientists." Other sources of revenue are the yearly fees and assessments of members, the renting of land owned by the society, and a "three-year fund" subscribed to by a few men who are willing to help the good work.

The society hopes in the future to work along the line laid down by Louis Agassiz for its collection, and to foster still more the use of its material in useful and educational ways, and for recreation. It only needs money to extend its influence.